LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION

Invest $19.6 million in state funding in Early On, the state’s early intervention program that helps identify and serve very young children with developmental delays and their families.

BACKGROUND: The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C program was created in 1986 to help states identify and serve very young children with developmental delays and disabilities, with the goal of ensuring children’s optimal development and reducing the need for special education. Michigan’s program, Early On, receives federal funding to help identify children with delays. However, because Michigan is the only state that does not provide a statewide budget allocation for early intervention, the services the state is able to provide are not sufficient to meet the need.

- A 2013 audit of Early On concluded that children in the program did not have access to a comprehensive range of early intervention services delivered by qualified personnel. The state’s response to the audit was, and continues to be, that it would seek state funding for Early On—a goal that has not yet been realized.

- To be eligible for Early On, children from birth to age 3 must either: 1) have a developmental delay at least 20% below the mean; or 2) have one of the established medical conditions likely to lead to delays. Early On identifies delays in many areas, including cognitive, language, physical and social-emotional.

- Disparities exist in access to early childhood programs and services. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to experience developmental delays and these outcomes are compounded by race/ethnicity. Children of color receiving Early On services are more likely to be economically disadvantaged. A lack of state funding prevents all eligible children from participating in Early On; increased funding would help to reduce existing disparities.

- The Special Education Funding Subcommittee chaired by Lt. Gov. Brian Calley recently identified state funding for Early On as the foundation for establishing financial stability for Michigan’s special education system. The subcommittee’s report pointed to peer states’ investments in early intervention, ranging from $58 million in Minnesota to $126 million in Pennsylvania.

WHY IT MATTERS:

- Brain scientists have demonstrated the importance of early intervention. Scientists have shown that as much as 90% of the architecture of the brain is built in the first 1,000 days of a child’s life—affecting his or her development for years to come.

- Children whose delays are identified and remediated early in life are more likely to succeed in school. The National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study found that 56% of children receiving early intervention services functioned in the average or above average range for academic skills when they entered kindergarten.

- Early intervention services for infants and toddlers could reduce the need for special education services. The same study found that 42% of children who participated in early intervention did not need special education services in later years.